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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - HANDLE ACCORDINGLY  
SIPDIS

STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NGO BRINGS URGENTLY NEEDED MEDICAL CARE  
TO NEGLECTED COMMUNITIES IN THE NIGER DELTA

1.(U) Summary: On November 4 PolOffs met with Chris Ekiyor, Chairman of the Ijaw Youth Council, who is also an oral surgeon bringing free and urgently needed health care to the Niger Delta with his partner Philip Ugbodaga through their NGO, Rural Africa Health Initiative (RAHI). The organization hopes to increase long-term sustainability of medical aid by equipping existing small hospitals in the region and providing staffing from the large pool of unemployed medical professionals in Nigeria. Because RAHI wishes to remain independent of Nigerian government funding, it is seeking to identify possible private or NGO donors of used medical equipment. End Summary.

2.(U) On November 4, Chris Ekiyor and his partner Philip Ugbodaga, both oral surgeons, told PolOffs they founded RAHI in 1999 to provide free medical care to people in the Niger Delta, who do not have access to or cannot afford medical care. (Note: Ekiyor is also Chairman of the Ijaw Youth Council, a graduate of the Federation for Ethnic Harmony in Nigeria's nonviolence training, and a former IVLP participant. End note.) RAHI takes a team composed of medical professionals, who volunteer their services free of charge, into communities using a mobile clinic. Team members spend the first day advertising their presence and services; on the following days they perform triage on the patients who come to them from the surrounding area, deciding which they can handle with the staff and facilities available, and which patients need to be stabilized for future treatment at a different location. The treatment provided during the clinic frequently addresses medical problems that have been festering for years, Ekiyor said.

RAHI Plans Upgrades for Niger Delta Hospitals

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13. (U) Ekiyor and Ugbodaga would like to increase the sustainability of activities by providing selected hospitals with used medical equipment from developed countries and staffing clinics with unemployed Nigerian medical professionals. RAHI has identified over 20 hospitals in rural communities suitable for this project. All these facilities have been built, but lack both equipment and staff. RAHI plans to start with a facility in Bayelsa State which has recently been refurbished by the Niger Delta Development Corporation (NDDC). RAHI is seeking equipment from institutions which are modernizing their own equipment and would be prepared to donate the replaced equipment to the project. RAHI anticipates paying for the transport of the

equipment from the donor to the recipient hospital. Among the equipment needed are boat ambulances, life-support systems, and surgical theater machinery.

#### Unemployed Nigerian Doctors to Staff Hospitals

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¶4. (U) Ekiyor and Ugbodaga want to make the refurbished and equipped facilities sustainable by tapping into the large pool of trained medical professionals in Nigeria who are currently unemployed. RAHI expects to pay participating medical professionals only for their travel and expenses. However, Ekiyor and Ugbodaga are certain that the doctors would participate as a way to gain experience and to keep up their skills.

¶5. (U) In addition, Ekiyor and Ugbodaga noted that there are more than 5,000 Nigerian medical professionals in the United States, many of whom they believe would be willing to come back and work in Bayelsa if security improved and if loans were available to help them establish private practice. Ugbodaga estimated that it costs a doctor 1.5 million naira (approximately USD 13,000), to set up a private medical practice in Nigeria, but Nigerian banks are reluctant to provide loans to doctors without collateral.

¶6. (U) Ekiyor and Ugbodaga are attempting to identify potential donors of used medical equipment and partner hospitals in the United States and other developed countries. Ekiyor intends not to seek funding from Nigerian government sources because to do so would inhibit the NGO's

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independence, he believes. Although NDDC Managing Director Timi Alaibe has indicated interest in the project, Ugbodaga and Ekiyor are concerned that if NDDC were to become involved, the project would attain too high a profile and then others would try to find a way to profit from it.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Ekiyor, a longstanding contact of the Lagos Pol-Econ Section, is a knowledgeable interlocutor on the Niger Delta. However, this is the first information Post has had concerning the breath of the work done by his medical NGO. End Comment.  
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